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Sauter, Van Gordon

BOOKS IN REVIEW

A Spy Runs About in Baltimore

'The Espionage Establishment," by Thomas B. Ross and David Wise (Random House, $5.95).

"Spying might perhaps be tolerable if it were done by men of honor," Montesquieu once wrote, "but the infamy which inevitably attaches to the agent is a criterion of the infamy of the practice."

With nations fumbling about, threatening to club one another into oblivion, and honor being a very flexible concern among both men and nations, spying has developed into a highly acceptable and refined art.

Pulp writers to the contrary, spying is not performed by virile, dramatic men armed with Flash Gordon gadgets and surrounded by nymphets. Spying is arduous and tedious work frequently carried out by venal, uninspiring and corrupt men.

ONE OF THE most pathetic figures in this book is the Soviet spy Robert Baltch. To help establish his cover, Baltch thrashed about in the chorus line of a little theater Gilbert and Sullivan production in Baltimore.

That was certainly above the call of duty.

But there are spies galore in "The Espionage Establishment." Some, like the leaders of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency, are members of the old school tie, Ivy League establishment. They reflect a distinct attitude of noblesse oblige.

OTHERS ARE UP from the ranks, men who somehow survived the frequently lethal labyrinths of Communist party systems. They usually began as obscure provincial functionaries and eventually emerged as men of incredible if not unrestrained power.

But generally, they turn out to be pure bureaucrats — plodding resolutely along, following exacting orders, always wary of anything that could rock the boat. In espionage, it seems, the game is more exciting than the players.

Mr. Ross, a Washington correspondent for the Chicago Sun-Times, and Mr. Wise, a former White House reporter for the New York Herald Tribune, have assembled a detailed picture of both the game and the more prominent players.

THEIR BOOK CONTAINS a surprising amount of detail — and insight — about the espionage establishments of the United States, Russia, England and Red China. The best reading is toward the end of the book, when some of the more exciting spy cases of recent years are related.

Prior to this time, most of the cases have been only superficially reported—probably because the information was not readily available.

But besides the details and the tales, the authors have a distinct message. They warn that "Democracies are not exempt from the subtler dangers flowing from the creation of huge centers of secret power in their midst."

THEY ADD, "An intelligence establishment may err or take some action, deliberately or otherwise, that embarrasses the national leadership or even threatens the stability of the government."

They argue, convincingly and with documentation, that the CIA is not subjected to the scrutiny and control necessary to keep its vast power disciplined and within bounds.

So far, a group of congressmen and members of the establishment have managed to protect the agency from adequate congressional supervision.

"If the American vision is to be sustained," Messrs. Ross and Wise write, "the American people must guard against the easy rationalization that anything can be excused in defense of the American way of life. Otherwise, we may one day wake up to discover the face in the mirror is no longer our own."

As the noted critic Jacques Barzun has warned, "The soul of the spy is somehow the model of us all."

—By Van Gordon Sauter